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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TUNIS 000986

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/MAG (SWILLIAMS, MNARDI, VSTEWART)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/01/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: BEN ALI RESHUFFLES TUNISIA'S CABINET - PARTIALLY

REF: 07 TUNIS 1224

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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¶1. (U) On August 30, President Ben Ali partially reshuffled his cabinet. The changes affect the Education, Agriculture, and Cultural Ministries among others. Rumors persist that more changes may be coming. Comments begin in paragraph 3, and biographic data on the new Ministers is in paragraph 6. End Summary.

¶2. (C) This is the first cabinet shuffle since September 2007, although the last shuffle of the major "sovereign ministries" was in 2005. The following Ministries have new Ministers: Ministry of Education and Training - Hatem Ben Salem; Ministry of Culture - Abderraouf Basti; Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources - Abdessalem Mansour; Ministry of Employment and Professional Integration of Youth - Slim Tlatli; Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Physical Training - Samir Labidi; and Ministry of Public Works, Housing and Land Management - Salheddine Malouche.

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Comment  
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¶3. (C) There was no comment in the press regarding the fate of Ministers who had been replaced except to say they would be called to other functions. There has been speculation that several will fill Ambassadorial vacancies. There are some indications that further changes are ahead. Rumors continue to suggest, for example, that Minister of Interior Haj Kacem will go on to a leadership role in the ruling RCD party.

¶4. (C) Four of the changes are of particular interest. Hatem Ben Salem and Abderraouf Basti were both promoted out of key positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Secretary of State for European Affairs and Secretary of State for Maghreb, Arab, and African Affairs respectively. Ben Salem, who has been a very good contact of the Embassy has been given a difficult task as the new Minister for Education -- a ministry with strong unions and in serious need of reform. Basti becomes the new Minister of Culture. While they have been promoted, Ben Salem and Basti's transfers may also be an indication that Foreign Minister Abdallah is strengthening his hold on the ministry. We suspect their replacements will be more beholden to Abdallah.

¶5. (SBU) Abdessalem Mansour was moved from being the President and Director General for the Finance Bank for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, also a position of interest to us, to become the new Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources. Slim Tlatli, an important contact for commercial issues, was moved out of the position of the President's

Special Advisor for Large Scale Projects to become Minister of Employment and Professional Integration of Youth.

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Biographic Information on the New Appointees  
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16. (U) Short biographical details on the new appointees follow:

-- Hatem, Ben Salem: Minister of Education and Training. Ben Salem has a Ph.D. in Law from the University of Paris. From 1996-2000 he was Ambassador to Senegal, Guinea, The Gambia, Cape Verde, and Turkey and finally the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations in Geneva. In 2002, he was named General Coordinator for Human Rights at the Ministry of Justice. In 2003, he was appointed Secretary of State to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Maghreb and African Affairs, and then in 2004 he became Secretary of State for European Affairs until now. He is a member of the ruling RCD party's central committee. Ben Salem was born February 8, 1956. He is married and has three children. In 1974 he was an American Field School exchange student and lived with a family in New Jersey.

-- Abderraouf, Basti: Minister of Culture. He has a B.A. equivalent in Arab Literature and Language from the University of Tunis. Basti was Ambassador to Lebanon from 1999-2000. From 2000-2002 he was President of the Tunisian Establishment of Radio and Television and then Ambassador to Amman. In 2007 he was named Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Maghreb, Arab, and African

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Affairs. Born in Tunis August 19, 1947, he is married with four children.

-- Abessalem Mansour: Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources. Mansour has a Masters degree in Agricultural Economics from the University of Minnesota. In 1999 he was appointed President of the Council of Enterprise and Director General of the Agency for Promotion of Foreign Investment (APIE). In 2005 he was named President and Director General of the Finance Bank for Small and Medium Businesses (BFPME). He was born November 19, 1949 in Sousse. He is married and has two children.

-- Slim Tlatli: Minister of Employment and Professional Integration of Youth. He has a B.S. equivalent in Mathematics from the University of Grenoble, and a Masters in Administration from the Institute of Business and Administration in Grenoble. Teltli was in the past a consultant to the UNDP and to USAID. From 2005 until now he was Secretary of State in charge of modernizing the sector in the Ministry of Tourism. Also, in November 2005 he was appointed as Principal Advisor to the President and President of the High Commission for Large Scale Projects. He was born April 6, 1951, is married and has two children.

-- Samir Labidi: Minister of Youth, Sports and Physical Training. He has a Masters degree in International Law and Relations. In 2000 he was President of the Commission of Exterior Relations and International Cooperation at the Economic and Social Council. From 2005 until now he was Tunisia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and the Disarmament Conference in Geneva. In Geneva he was president of the group of Arab League Ambassadors, president of the group of African Ambassadors at the International Organization for Migration and President of the Disarmament Conference. Labidi served twice in, 1999 and 2004, as a member of the government's presidential and legislative election monitoring committee. Labidi was born January 8, 1962 in Gafsa. He is married and has two children.

-- Salheddine Malouche: Minister of Public Works, Housing,

and Land Management. He has university degree in civil engineering and Management degree from the American University of Pittsburgh. In 2000 he was named President and Director General of the Agency for Rehabilitation and Urban Renewal, a post he held until this new appointment. He has been an activist in the ruling RCD party since and participated in the preparatory work at the local and national levels for the 2008 RCD congress. Malouche was born June 4, 1956 in Kairouan. He is married and has three children.

-- Chokri Mamoghli: Secretary of State for External Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Handicrafts. Mamoghli has a Ph.D. in finance from the University of Paris and an Administration degree from the Higher Institute of Administration of Tunis. He has held numerous academic positions, most recently Director of the Higher Institute of Administration from 2004-2007. In 2007 he was named as Secretary of State at the Ministry of Commerce and Handicrafts. Mamoghli was born November 26, 1958 in Tunis. He is married and has two children.

-- Bechir Louzir: Secretary of State for Sports, Ministry of Youth. Louzir holds a Ph.D. in Medicine from the University of Tunis. He is specialist in lung diseases and allergies. He teaches at the University of Medicine of Tunis and since 2003 has been the Coordinator for the National Olympic Committee. Since 2001 he has also served as the Vice President for the African Federation of Volleyball. Louzir was born December 12, 1961 in Tunis. He is married and has three children.

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